

WETLANDS

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A Day's Tour Among Duxbury's Ponds, Lakes, Brooks and Creeks

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The day dawned crystal clear and cold. The thermometer had stood in the mid-teens for the last several days and I knew I could probably navigate woods, trails and small streams and edges of swamps without miring my 1968 Tempest wagon. The tv program on water resources of our area had alarmed me. It spoke frighteningly of Brockton and its dwindling water supply in Silver Lake reservoir. Some residents of the reservoir area had reported that their wells had gone dry; others of the fear that contamination of industrial wastes was endangering their health. Brockton at this writing is forbidding all building construction that might involve the use of water. My own research reported in the Clipper a year ago that Duxbury's water supply, relying as it does on wells and aquifers, was not in danger. I knew of many cranberry bogs in town, and I had seen on town maps locations of many streams and bodies of water...I was determined to search them out for myself and see just how much surface water is available in Duxbury.

My first stop was the offices of the highway department where, on a wall map, I could see spread out before me all Duxbury's water areas. They are tremendous; to look at them all at once is truly mind-boggling. I had planned a quick circuit of the town, but I could see I had a day's tour before me. (Actually by omitting some areas that I already had visited I cut the time factor down to a long morning.)

I pointed my Pontiac out Tobey Garden St. and pulled up on the shoulder of the road beside Island Creek Pond. (The landing on Island Creek Pond is our only fresh water town landing.) This pond incidentally has been pronounced "dead" by reason of acid rain. I looked closely at the stone culvert that supports the highway and noted its ancient gr: : construction, probably the original one beside an old mill that once stood here. I walked down the stream a few yards and looked around. A scene of sylvan beauty that felt like the Green Mountains of Vermont. I noted in my mind that this creek forms the pond on Rte. 3A where Cushing harvested ice until 1959, and then courses down through what used to be the railroad trestle area and into the marsh where a little island on the right as it enters the Bay probably gives it its name.

I stopped a moment at Marita Russell's wild life area (now owned by the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society) just at the western edge of the pond and recalled Round Pond where my father used to harvest ice, and Pike Lake over beyond the Expressway. I next turned down Chandler St. to Bolas Rd. and Turkey Ridge Lane, where I passed several cranberry bogs and stopped at Holly Hill Farm to look at a pair of ponds I did not find named on the maps. Continuing on Chandler St., I noted the Garside Reservoir and South

River's origins. This river travels many miles through wooded areas (and many acres of land owned by the town) before it enters Marshfield and thence into the ocean. From the east Harlow Brook and Philip's Brook join it here in Duxbury.

Entering Congress St. (Rte. 14) I turned left and drove a half mile or so to Ashdod fire station, where I knew I'd find willing direction finders. I was not disappointed; when I asked the fire fighters where the old mill dam was they pointed to a pond on the left and a stream running under the highway. I walked down the bank to stand on ail that remains of the old mill race and the dam spillways that made this probably the largest water powered enterprise in the town in the mid-1700's.

Duxbury at this time boasted a score of mills, directing water power to saw lumber, grind grain, weave textiles and so on. A tour of our water spots is a convincing demonstration that what we did once we can do again. New England switched from sailing ships to water power and became the great manufacturing center of the country in the early days of this century. With coal and oil and nuclear power, the focus has moved away, but the hills and streams and valleys of New England are still here and many a "minihydro" is being reactivated. Certainly the dangers of nuclear power generation and the limited amounts of fossil fuels are much in mind among thinking people today, and not least in Duxbury, which receives 40 inches of rain a year.

Our streams, all of which flow into the ocean, ultimately were our earliest highways, and our roads, except for the Massachusetts Bay Path and the present Tremont St., were laid out perpendicular to the shore. Washington St. was completed only in 1798. Some houses in Duxbury still face what was the road to the water. It is easy to understand Duxbury's growth into shipbuilding from these days when everyone had to have a boat and all early lands were parceled out so there was access to a water way just as today we insist on frontage or highway access.

Much of the information I am sharing herewith can be read in Dorothy Wentworth's "Roundabout Duxbury" and "Settlement and Growth of Duxbury."

I next took a long drive to Keene St. and swinging right skirted Keene's Mill Pond, which also empties into South River after watering several cranberry bogs close by the road. One can see by the number of cranberry bogs throughout the "Back Area" of Duxbury why the decision was made when the water engineers put in town water in 1914, not to set up a town reservoir, but to use aquifers and standpipes. Surface water is needed in great abundance for these bogs. I now turned southwest on Temple St., noting the massive Wright's reservoir on the left fed by a stream issuing from a large pond just beyond West St. (Rte. 14), and so back to Tremont St. (Rte. 3A). At this point I crossed Malachy's Brook, which originates beyond North Hill in the North Hill Marsh, and headed down 3A to Millbrook. I did not drive down Duck Hill Rd. to check out Duck Hill River, since I had done this when I was looking into our town landings.

Millbrook was the location of the first mill in Duxbury. Early settlers carried their grain to Plymouth for grinding at first, but after a time it was decided that a mill located "on the other side of the Village" would be better, and members of the infant community were required to bring their grain here for processing. The mill stood here for many years, moving from grist to textiles and was finally owned by Ezra Weston, who used it to weave cloth for the sails of his ships. Ford's Store just up the hill on the right owned the mill for a time, but it fell into disuse and was burned one Fourth of July night.

Duck Hill River becomes Back River as it debouches into the Cove area and furnishes the largest flow of all the tidal rivers of the great Duxbury Marsh. Tidal rivers were not part of my inquiry, as they have no effect on town activities. I list them in order just for the record: Little Wood Island River, Great Wood Island River, Cut River (so named for the canal that still can be discerned joining Duxbury Bay to the ocean at Brant Rock). I remember so vividly the Marconi Wireless Tower that was used to send messages to Europe, anchored by enormous concrete blocks (as large as a small house) into the shore here. The other day just to reinforce this memory I drove by the spot and sure enough the concrete blocks are still there. I must hastily correct a possible misinterpretation. I said "was not detailing 'tidal waters'" because they had no effect on Duxbury activities but I must add in haste that Pine Point, the location of the Cable Landing in 1869, was a patriotic rallying center, with large passenger sailboats gathering people at the Old Cove and sailing them at high tide over to this spot. Someone has said that every year a "Duxbury holiday" was declared and all citizens would gather here for picnics and games, returning on the next tide. Of course when Powder Point Bridge was built (in 1895) the passenger schooner was unnecessary.

Our next stop was Blue Fish River, where I grew up, and remember playing among the last vestiges of ship's ways recalling the great ship-building days. Blue Fish River also boasted a mill, a tidal one built in 1755 and sold when the first drawbridge was built in 1803, and then rebuilt later to be dismantled in 1879 to make way for the present stone bridge built in 1881. I remembered the river of my teen years, waist high in spots even at low tide, now pretty well filled up, with even a section of marsh grass growing in the space where it parallels St. George St. This reminded me of the early appropriation of the town of funds to "redig the streams" and thus assist in the smooth flow of water for mills and highways. Every year the town appropriates a sum of money to clean up the streams; one day it may be moved to redig the streams to make possible a new renewable energy resource.

Blue Fish River originates from 3 locations: west from the Millbrook area (perhaps Ford's Pasture) and from Wright's Dike and a small stream and pond at the base of North Hill, and springs just beyond Partridge Rd. Some day I hope to write a complete story centered on this River and its history, carried down to the present in the Blue Fish River Corporation.

For our last 2 water areas we move all the way to Standish Shore and Eagle's Nest Creek which originates from the base of Captain's Hill below the Standish Monument and finds its estuary in Harden Hill Bay. Beyond this creek and within a few yards of the Bay we find Allen's Pond, so named on all contour maps. It is remarkable to think that this fresh water pond emerges from the land so surrounded by salt water. Even more remarkable is the nearby spring Myles Standish's family used which is only a stone's throw from the Bay. A stone marks the spot where the spring stood before it was wiped out in the great blizzard of 1851.

A quick turn around the hill brings us to Kingston Bay and the end of our journey where we began at Island Creek Pond. It may be helpful to point out that the Jones River estuary in Kingston was a great center for all kinds of industrial activity, as was Kingston Bay itself: wharves for ships, a brick yard at Seabury Point, and with a much larger navigable area at the mouth of Island Creek, many other early enterprises.

So we conclude our report on Duxbury's streams and lakes and ponds with an enthusiastic feeling. If, as our town leaders assure us, we can open up some of these areas for recreation, with careful policing we can forego that expensive trip to Maine, New Hampshire or Vermont, and driving a mile or 2 can have just as much wilderness picnicking at far less expense. My day on the streams and ponds has convinced me that Duxbury has a hidden resource untapped for a century or so, both for power use and recreation. When we think of picnicking we think of the Bay or the Beach; the time may be near when we can think of our woods and streams as well.

